

March 4, 2021

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, ranking members Kissel and Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am from Essex and a supporter of CT Against Gun Violence. I am a 78-year-old retired woman, I spent my early career as a social worker and many volunteer hours advocating for prisoners and the poor. I've worked with people whose lives were destroyed by guns, either because they were involved in a shooting, or suffered the loss of someone who was. The saddest cases are those whose family or friends lives could have been saved with an intervention.

Connecticut was the first state in the nation to pass an Extreme Risk Protection Order law, in 1999. It offers a means of last resort, with due process protections, to temporarily remove firearms from individuals judged to be at risk of imminent harm to themselves or others. It has been shown to prevent firearm suicide and stop mass shootings. It is time to strengthen the law so that it works harder to prevent gun violence. In particular, when the protection order expires, it should be a requirement that the subject is no longer at risk of violence before the firearms are returned. That is not the case now.

ERPOs are effective because even though individuals may legally possess guns, they can be dangerous to themselves or others. Background checks are a point-in-time measure that can't detect dangers that family members, friends and co-workers can sense. Individuals considering suicide often give some sign of their intentions. An FBI study of the pre-attack behaviors of active shooters found on average they displayed four to five observable and concerning behaviors that suggested the possibility of violent intentions.

I ask that you favorably report HB-6355 out of committee so that the General Assembly can vote to strengthen our Extreme Risk Protection law so that it works harder to prevent firearm suicide and homicide. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Claire Matthews

Essex, CT.